



13th Annual State of the City Address

Thursday, February 19, 2015

Good evening! It is my distinct pleasure to welcome you to my 13th Annual State of the City Address.

Let me begin by saying that the state of our city is good and getting better.

To my fellow council members, fellow elected officials, City staff, business and community leaders, and others who are present tonight – welcome and thank you for being here. Each year, I am honored by your presence and continued support.

Also, I'd like to welcome my fellow residents who are viewing us on Durham Television Network as well as those who are watching tonight's live stream from the City of Durham's website.

2014 – What will you remember from last year?

Is it the astounding economic development happening in Durham, the opening of the Durham Innovation District (DID), the construction of new hotels, offering visitors and convention-goers more than 400 hotel rooms?

Is it the festivals, like the long-established CenterFest and the new Art of Cool, which brought thousands to our city to enjoy great music and art, and adding more than a million dollars into our local economy?

Or, is it questions raised and the actions taken by some in the community about law enforcement's relationship with residents...questions that eventually led to a number of actions being put into place to increase transparency, trust and accountability with our residents.

What will you remember? For me, 2014 is a memorable year for a lot of reasons, including many of those just mentioned.

But what stands out in my mind is how we, as a community, despite the challenges that come our way, continue to come together and engage each other about what is important to us, to our children and, indeed, to our grandchildren.

My annual State of the City address is a time to look at how our accomplishments over a year's time are positioning us for the future.

But before I go on, I'd like to start by continuing our tradition of looking back at the year before -- at our accomplishments, our accolades, at how we all worked together to build on our mission to make Durham a great place to live, work and play.

Don't just take it from me. Look at the accolades showered on Durham last year...

- #15 America's Smartest Cities – *Forbes*
- #18 Best Cities for Young Entrepreneurs – *NerdWallet*
- #29 Top 100 Best Cities to live in 2015 – *Livability*
- #23 America's 25 fittest Cities – *The Active Times*
- Best Places to Travel in 2015 – *Travel + Leisure*
- #47 Best Performing Cities of 200 metros – *Milken Institute*

The list goes on. Accolades that show that Durham's future is bright...so bright in fact, that we just might need shades.

I'd like to take just a quick moment to thank the Office of Public Affairs for giving us a quick look back at many of the highlights of last year.

So much of what we accomplished was the result of a successful partnership and relationship between City Council, City staff, led by City Manager Tom Bonfield, City Attorney Patrick Baker, City Clerk D. Ann Gray, and our remarkable community.

We are now into the third year of implementing our five strategic plan goals and the administration is in an ongoing process to align their department's functions to meet these strategic goals. I want to reiterate those goals from the Mayor's perspective as they affect the state of our city.

STRONG & DIVERSE ECONOMY

Our economy has improved considerably, our unemployment rate at 4.4 percent is one of the lowest in the state, but if you are one of the 4.4 percent that is still unemployed, then unemployment remains a problem, which we hope will be solved.

We need to continue to work to provide quality paying jobs for our residents who want to work. We must continue to create a business-friendly environment, attracting quality businesses, supporting work training programs that are aligned with what employers need, such as those proposed by "Made In Durham" and workforce development.

We must do this while at the same time creating an atmosphere with respect to regulations or procedures and guidelines that encourage businesses that are already committed to our city to want to stay and grow, as well as those who may be entertaining moving to our city.

A sustainable workforce and business friendly environment will be key to our continued quality growth and development and to a strong and diverse economy.

SAFE & SECURE COMMUNITY

Durham's population increased by 28.55 percent (190,218 to 244,522) from 2001 to 2014. While our population has increased, our violent crime rate has decreased.

- 974.68 incidents of violent crime per 100,000 population in 2001
- 764.76 incidents of violent crime per 100,000 population in 2014

Our property crime rate has also decreased, even though our population has grown considerably.

- 6,980.4 incidents of property crime per 100,000 population in 2001
- 4,528 incidents of property crime per 100,000 population in 2014

Overall, the total index crime per 100,000 residents has trended down from 2001 (50 percent), except that it was up slightly (0.5 percent) in 2014 compared to 2013.

- 7,955.08 total index crime per 100,000 population in 2001
- 5,293.16 total index crime per 100,000 population in 2014

We must continue to focus on making crime reduction a priority, along with the continued support of our fire department in its attempts to be more responsive to fire calls and the education of our residents on fire safety.

THRIVING, LIVABLE NEIGHBORHOODS

We are making good progress in the revitalization of our neighborhoods, particularly in some of those neighborhoods that have been depressed for years.

I continue to believe that “Strong Neighborhoods Make a Strong City” and contribute greatly to the quality of life in our city.

While we continue to focus on helping to improve those neighborhoods that have been distressed, we as a Council and Administration must maintain a sensitivity, awareness and responsiveness to issues in other neighborhoods throughout the city.

I mean everyday issues that are brought to our attention through individual conversations, phone calls, emails, and written letters and at our Coffee with Council sessions, if we are to have thriving, livable neighborhoods.

WELL-MANAGED CITY

Fiscally, we continue to maintain our triple A Bond ratings with the three major bond rating agencies (Standard & Poor's, Moody's and Fitch).

A well-managed city depends on having good employees committed to their jobs and providing the services for which they are hired. In my opinion, City employees are among the best committed civil servants. We have a very diverse work force of over 2,400 employees. Many of our employees go beyond the call of duty in performing their duties, and for that we are grateful.

However, just as we expect those employees to perform their duties, it is also important that they all be treated fairly, no matter the positions that they hold in City government – from the lowest-paid staff person to the highest-paid staff person. All should be judged and disciplined fairly when necessary.

However, we know that in certain instances, there have been allegations of unequal treatment in discipline and other employment areas with some of our employees.

It is important that we determine the veracity of these allegations, and if they prove to be true, provide equitable solutions to correct them as well as establish procedures and guidelines to ensure that they don't reoccur. If they do occur, the persons responsible for those inequities should be held accountable and accordingly disciplined.

STEWARDSHIP OF CITY'S PHYSICAL ASSETS

This is an ongoing effort and requires attention to detail as well as the resources to support the maintenance of our facilities.

To that end, I want to congratulate General Services Director Joel Reitzer for his leadership, who has recently announced that he will be retiring.

If you look around City Hall and other City facilities, you can see the results of his teams' work.

But, the City's physical assets consist of more than City buildings – it's also streets, sidewalks, water and sewer lines, waste management and other facilities that require our attention. We, as a Council, must be prepared to provide the resources needed to maintain our physical assets at a high level on an ongoing basis.

Last year, the City Council voted to dedicate ½ cent of the property tax, about \$1.2 million, for maintenance of our parks and recreation centers and trails.

As of December 31st, nearly half of the funding has been used or allocated for park and trail maintenance throughout the city.

These last two slides have shown just some of the much-needed repairs that have occurred at various parks throughout the city.

LOOKING FORWARD TO 2015 AND BEYOND

So, in addition to what we have commented on, what are some of the priorities for 2015?

Complete construction and occupancy of Phase 1 of 132 Lofts at Southside East.

In my opinion when it is completed, it will be one of the finest truly mixed income apartment developments in the state of North Carolina.

We also will begin planning for Phase 2 of 85 Lofts at Southside East.

We need to complete construction of 48 homes Southside West and begin planning for Southside west home sites.

We must continue our efforts, under the leadership of our Mayor Pro-Temp Cora Cole-McFadden and other agencies, to reduce homelessness in general and specifically for our veterans.

I would like to see us set a manageable goal for reducing homelessness in 2015.

Planning for the new police headquarters will begin in 2015 with the possibility of community input through a charrette.

While the city does not have the responsibility for building the Durham Orange Light Rail, we will have the responsibility for approving as well as planning for access to the transit stops and also approving important sections to the plan for the corridor going through Durham.

It is important that our residents, as well as the appropriate City staff, attend critical public meetings set for March, June and September of this year. There are decisions to be made that will help determine the next steps for the Durham Orange Light Rail project.

More details on these meetings will be publicized by Triangle Transit and I encourage residents to visit the website listed on the screen for more information.

If the Federal Transit Administration gives approval to enter into engineering in fall 2016, then 2016 to 2019 will be devoted to engineering the project, after which if the Federal Transit Administration approves a Full Funding Grant Agreement in 2019, utility relocation would begin in 2020.

Construction would be from 2021 to 2025 and testing and start-up would be in 2026...all assuming state and local matching funds are available.

Decisions by the City Council on street resurfacing and side walk plans need to be made as well as decisions on City swimming pool repairs.

We also must continue to work with Google, Time Warner, AT&T and Frontier in preparation for fiber installation.

And, we have to continue to be focused on reducing crime and improving police/community relations.

POLICE AND THE COMMUNITY

I recently attended the United States Conference of Mayor's Winter Conference in Washington, D.C. last month, and attended the committee on "Strengthening Police-Community Relations in America's Cities."

Key areas of the committee's focus were recommendations on:

- Building Trust Between Police and Community
- Improving Police Department Practices
- Ensuring Timely and Accurate Communications
- Conducting Independent Investigations of Deaths Relating to Police Encounters
- Addressing Racial and Economic Disparities and Community Frustration with and Distrust of Governmental Institutions
- Providing National Leadership

I have shared this report with our City Manager and requested that he review it for applicability to our situation here in Durham, and report his recommendations to the City Council.

The report states that in some instances, the recommendations go beyond the purview of mayors/city councils and police chiefs, and calls for actions by the broader community in cities, the nation as a whole, and by the federal government. The report may also be the basis for a broader Durham community conversation on police and community relations.

However, let me emphasize that we as a City Council and City Administration respect and support the overall work that our police department does in providing services to the residents of our city.

I have repeatedly said that they probably have one of the more difficult responsibilities in our City Administration in serving our city. At the same time, we must always evaluate how those services are being delivered and work to improve those areas in which they may be deficient, while applauding and acknowledging those efforts that go beyond the normal call of duty, or in solving very difficult cases.

Our police officers put their lives on the line every day, and for that, we are most grateful. We are angered when we see attempts on their lives.

We will support their efforts at the highest level to apprehend those persons responsible for such cowardly acts and ask the community's support in helping to apprehend such individuals.

REDUCING POVERTY INITIATIVE

As you may recall in my February 2014 State of the City Address, I focused on the challenge of "Reducing Poverty Neighborhood-by-Neighborhood, Year-by-Year starting in 2014."

We kicked off the initiative in March 2014 at the Durham Rescue Mission with over 100 people from a broad cross section of the community in attendance.

We established six task forces – Education; Finance; Health; Housing; Jobs; and Public Safety.

I want to thank all of the people who volunteered their time and service on this initiative, to include the staffs of the City, County and Durham Public Schools, and most importantly, the residents of the neighborhoods in which the initiative has focused.

The Reducing Poverty Initiative focused on neighborhoods in North East Central Durham with approximately 2,300 people living in approximately 1,100 homes and apartments.

After many meetings among the task force members, staff and most importantly, the residents of the neighborhoods, a community survey of the neighborhoods was conducted focusing on the six task force areas.

The results of those surveys were compiled by the City's Neighborhood Improvement Services Department staff and distributed to the task force members, as well as shared with the residents.

In January of this year, the task forces assembled at Holton Resource and Community Center to present their action plans to address the issues derived from the community surveys, and to respond to questions from those in attendance.

The year 2015 will be a year of action for the task forces to implement and execute their plans, with periodic reports to the City Council at our work sessions.

As I said last year, the road to reducing poverty is not easy, and is mostly uphill.

I have seen over the last few months that people in poverty are willing to work in partnership with the many people who are willing to assist them. It is a journey that we must continue.

CONCLUSION

Finally, as I conclude, great things continue to happen in our city.

We are the fourth largest city in North Carolina with a population of approximately 245,000 people. We are a city with a very diverse population with no ethnic majority. As with any large and growing city, we have many challenges, some of which I have spoken to earlier in my remarks.

As we grow and develop we must also continue to be environmentally and infrastructure sensitive to the decisions that we make in approving growth and development, while striking the balance that will continue to make our city attractive and sustainable.

We also know that as Councilman Brown and my other colleagues so often say, "We have more needs than resources." We always have the challenge of making decisions that lead to a balanced budget, while at the same time taking into consideration those priorities with which we have the resources to support.

I remain convinced that we as a City and Administration, led by our City Manager, City Attorney and City Clerk, are up to meeting those challenges.

Thanks again for taking the time to listen and I hope that you agree with me that "Great Things are happening in Durham" and that the state of our city is good and getting better.

May God Bless America and May God Bless Durham.